[Ed Currin]

January 14, 1939

Ed Currin (white)

North College Street

Oxford, N.C.

Retired farmer, landlord, jack-of-all trades

Beth Cannady, writer

Edwin Massengill, reviser

OLD JOSH DOVER Original Names Changed Names

Granville County Duncan County

Ed Currin Josh Dover

Dr. Thomas Dr. Harrell

Alice Mavis

Lily Becky

Durham Dawson

Mary Josie

Ruth Hazel

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Franklin County Bullock County

Tommy Ed

Hutcherson Madison

Cooper Banner

Henderson Albriton

Asheville Asheville

Kittrel Manton

Charlie Louis C9 - N.C. Box 2

Charlie Williams Charlie Hines

Oxford Stratford

Richmond Rickford

Henry Cooper Levi Cassaway

Dave Lon

Ike Dave

Willie Martin

Minnie Sally

Ella Kate

Mrs. Tippet Mrs. Tolar

Fairport Ashtown

OLD JOSH DOVER

Nearly everybody in Duncan County knows Josh Dover, and almost everyone can tell a story of his past kindness and generosity. Unless one happens to be a newcomer in the community, Josh can give the family history for several generations back.

It is over a mile from Josh's house to the courthouse, but, despite his eighty-two years, Josh walks to town on business every day that the weather permits. That “business” is talking. Wherever he is, he always has an audience that listens to him with strict attention.

Josh is a staunch Democrat. His men usually win, and the candidates want his support. He can't be bought, and he tells a man outright, if he is asked, his opinion of his running for office. A young lawyer, hardly out of college, was running for the legislature. He called on Josh to ask his support.

“Bless my soul!” began the old man. “What would your old dad, who's dead and gone, think of me if I helped 2 send his baby boy off with a man's job? Why, son, you have to crawl before you can walk. You stay here and let the folks watch you grow into a fine lawyer, and Josh Dover'll have you in the White House.”

The young candidate smiled and thanked him for his advice. He lost the election.

Several days ago, Josh was walking down the street with a brisk waddling stride. He was wearing a topcoat that was broader than his thin, straight shoulders needed.

“Good evening,” he greeted, peering over his spectacles with searching blue eyes. “Why, child, I didn't know you. I can't half see through these glasses anyhow. Well, I get about

right smart, but I've always been an active, hard worker. I'm about past doing much work now. I've had heart trouble about a year now, and I can't do what I used to.

“I know more about myself than anybody else. First time my ankles swelled up they called Dr. Harrell. I knew I had a heart flutterin', but I thought my short breath came from a congested chest. Doctor said my heart was 'fested and swelled up against my lungs. He gave me a bottle of medicine to take for this trouble and told me not to overtax myself. The first time I had that bottle refilled I asked the druggist if that stuff won't mighty near all spirits. I went and got some good ol'time corn whiskey, and I've been feeling better ever since.

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“Duncan County has plenty corn liquor, and as long as Josh Dover's head is hot he can get it. There's fifty men today that'll get it for me. All I do is say I need some corn spirits, and first thing you know I've got it. I don't ask 'how much', for these men are my friends and wouldn't take pay if I offered it.

“How well I remember Pappy's wine cellar down home. One mornin' durin' the War three or four Yankees came ramblin' around the house and tried to break in that cellar door. I was about seven years old, but I told them to get away from there. Then they cussed me.

“About that time mammy looked down and saw me holdin' a hot flatiron right over that Yankee's head. She grabbed it, but I spit on him just the same. I got a frailing for that, because Maw always said that spittin' was nigger doin'. I never was sorry that I spit on him, though.

“Hold on a minute and let me step in the store and get some butter.

“We always had plenty of milk and butter for the family and right smart buttermilk. Outside of that, Mavis, my wife, sold from $30 to $50 worth of milk and butter a month. I reckon the finest thing she ever spent the money on was to send Becky to art school. I didn't take to

it much, but my wife said she would pay for her lessons and buy all her outfits. The things she painted was to be my 4 wife's and stay at home as long as she lived. She painted all sorts of pictures. The stuff cost right smart, but Becky finished over there in two years. Then she went off and started to teach.

“She taught school three or four years and then married. When her husband got killed in an automobile accident in 1934 the shock near about unbalanced Becky. Po' thing, there she was away from all her folks, with three little children. She brought him home to bury him and then she collapsed. She wanted to take the insurance and buy a car to kill 'em all the way their daddy died. But she got over that and stayed on here till the summer after my wife died. Then Becky took it into her head to move to Dawson.

“My daughter, Josie, was here then with her little girl. Becky had a mighty hard time of it over there in Dawson tryin' to make enough out of her art lessons. Her insurance went like the wind, for she never did know how to save. She spent it all on fine furniture and picture shows and on her back. She was sick a lot, too, and so was the children. So Becky came here and started her class of art.”

The Dover place, an eight-room frame house, is almost surrounded by heavy porches and railings. The windows had all lost their blinds with the exception of an odd one here and there.

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The house was in fair condition, except for need of paint. There was a long hallway in which a dark mahogany settee, chairs, and a table from the old parlor sat forsakenly. The loud voice of an announcer boomed from the radio. Josh opened the door into Becky's living room. The room had always been the parlor till Becky moved back from Dawson. The walls had been freshly papered, and handsome paintings, in oil and pastels, were on the walls.

Hazel, Becky's pretty daughter, cried, Grandpa, have you had anything to eat?”

“Naw, child, I ain't hungry. I eat an oyster stew downtown. Look out there in the hall and get that butter. Never mind, I got to go out there. I'll be back toreckly.”

“Grandpa,” Hazel said, “goes off and we never know when he is coming back to dinner. Sometimes he sits around out in the backyard and [?] old tools or tinkers with something out there.”

There was a rattle of skates on the porch, and suddenly the room was alive with chattering little girls. Josh opened the door, and said, “Come on back here where we can talk.”

He led the way through the front room beyond the hall, which was still a bedroom with the high-backed walnut bed and marble-topped dresser. From this we went into the small room beyond where Josh sits and sleeps.

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“Sit down,” he said, pointing to a cushioned rocker and drawing up a straight chair for himself. “I don't want no rocker.”

He reached down, pulled off his shoes, and propped his feet, in their thick gray socks, on the wood box.

“Well, I was born and raised on the farm,” he began. “Every day I live I regret leavin' the farm. I've done a little of everything, though, and made money at everything I ever tried. If I'd had any education I guess I'd been somewhere today. There was eight of us children, and I was one of the oldest. I had to work. I was born in Duncan County 'bout fourteen miles south of here. I always will love the old place. It was one of my great-grandpa's plantations, but Pappy sold it for a good profit, and moved to the plantation down in Bullock County where we growed up.

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“It was the first year before the war that we moved to Bullock. I won't big enough to go to school. Maw had a teacher at home for the girls and we youngest boys.

“After the war we all had to work. When I was twelve years old I got up at four o'clock in the mornin' and plowed till 'leven, came to the house to eat dinner, then said my lesson and went back and plowed till night. I was so tired and broke down then I was ready to go right to bed as soon as I eat my supper. I did learn a little and always will regret my lack of schooling, for I've seen the need of education 7 all my life. If I hadn't bein naturally bright and had a headful of common sense, I never would have got along as well as I did.

“When I was seventeen years old, Pappy bought Grandpa's ole mill on the river. He took me down there with forty hands to put in a new chimney and rebuild the dam. I remember the day, the 22nd day of 1874. We took rashins from home and two good nigger men to cook for the hands and started to work on the dam. It was finished soon after Christmas and Pappy left me there to look after it. He said, 'Son, here's a book. Put your dates and bushels ground on this side and the tolls on the other, but never take any toll from a widow.'

“I lived up on the hill and had a miller to work at the mill, and we charged one-eighth for the toll. I had from fifty to seventy hogs and fed 'em on meal and water. I had cows and chickens, a good garden and plenty to eat. There was about twenty-five acres of clear land back of the house, where I planted a small crop. I was a miller and a farmer, too.

“I had a sawmill down there, too, and a water mill. I sawed and sold right smart timber down there. I had an ole nag horse and buggy, and on Saturday I went to town. Sundays I'd go around to see girls or my kinfolks. It was while I 8 was down there at the mill that I professed religion and joined the Baptist Church. I went to preachin' every second Sunday at my church, and went to another church on other Sundays.

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“While I was at the mill, my brother, Ed, was at a military school. When he left there in 1882 Pappy gave him and me the Madison place together. Me and Ed stayed down there at the mill together till we sawed enough timber to build a barn or two and some rough outhouses. Then we built a two-room house up there in the big grove and moved up there. The first year's crop was the finest tobacco I ever raised. I did the sellin'. The warehouses stayed open the year 'round then, and it was the first day of June, the year after we raised the crop that I sold the tobacco at Banner Warehouse at Albriton. I got $5,000 for that crop. Some of it brought over a dollar a pound, and the whole crop averaged better than forty cents.

“Ed never did try to get around like I did. I was just the other way. I didn't smoke, but I took my toddy and chewed tobacco. I bought fine horses and buggies and went a-courtin' every Saturday and Sunday. Sometimes durin' the week, if there was any parties, I played the fiddle, but I never played for the dances. I always took a girl and enjoyed every square dance for miles around. I was 9 flyin' around mightily when I was bachin' it with Ed. I guess twenty girls thought I was going to marry 'em.

“I always stayed pretty close around Duncan, 'cept for fairs and such, but in the summer of 1884 I went on a pleasure trip with two men friends. We went to Asheville and stayed in the mountains for about ten days.

“It was Christmas of that same year that I went down home and stopped in Manton to take my brother, Louis, on home. He was clerkin' at Uncle Charlie Hines' store, and I had to wait till near 'bout midnight for him to get off. Goin' on home that night I asked him what Uncle Charlie paid him to work for him. He said he got $75 a year, board and a suit of clothes. I told him I'd give him more than that to stay down at my place with Bro' Ed the next year and work for me. I wanted to go to Stratford to speculate on tobacco and trade some. I offered to pay all the expenses, clothe and feed him, and give him $200 a year. It didn't cost me nothin', for I made that on one trade the week after that.

“In 1883 I stayed in Stratford. I drove all over the county buyin' up tobacco from the farmers, and I bought it from the warehouse floors and shipped it to wholesalers in Rickford. It was that same year that I started tradin'. I bought mules and horses, twenty or thirty at a time, when I went to Rickford and sold 'em for a profit. I bought land, 10 lots, machinery, furniture, and anything else that came my way in a bargain. I made anywhere from 50 to 500 per cent profit on most everything I bought. Once I bought a whole block of lots in Stratford. I always had plenty of money in the bank, an' if I ever needed any extra, Colonel Levi Casaway, president of the bank, said I could get it—$5,000 anytime I wanted it.

“That year I went back to the farm with Bro' Ed. Bro' Louis wanted to go off to school, and I give him enough extra money to go. That year, too, I decided to get married. Things began to look like I could make money, and I wanted a home. It was the fall of 1886 when I asked Mavis to marry me. I'd been courtin' her for a year. She was my second cousin, but we never saw one another till we were grown. I thought she was the prettiest girl I ever saw. She had sparkling brown eyes and black hair and the sweetest voice I ever heard and a gentle smile and manner. I couldn't make her kiss me to save my life till I married her.

“I remember I took her home in my buggy the Christmas before we married in January. There was snow on the ground. Two or three miles before we got there, I said, 'Mavis, won't you kiss me before we get there, just a good-bye kiss? I won't get no chance when I leave, and I won't see you anymore until I come up here to marry you!'

“'No, I won't!' she fired back, 'and if you dare to stop this horse or lay a hand on me I'll jump out of this buggy and walk home in the snow.' I never will forget how her brown eyes snapped when she looked at me.

“Back in the fall of '86, soon as I knew I was goin' to marry, I made up my mind to have the finest plantation in that section, so I bought Bro' Ed's half. 'Twas about 300 acres in

that place, good soil, good creeks, and spring water, and plenty of pine timber standin'. I started out right then to make the best of that plantation. I bought a second-hand sawmill and started clearin' land and puttin' up buildin's. I built four more rooms to the two we had. I used the ole ones for the dinin' room and kitchen. They won't plastered, just ceiled. I put on a front porch, and a paling fence around the front yard. I fenced in the whole lot with a plank fence and painted the whole house and all the outhouses white. I dug a well right at the back door. In the corner of the back yard I built a one-room nigger house for the cook. 'Reckly after Christmas of 1887, I married and brought Mavis home.

“That first year I made a crop, but I kept right on buildin' and clearin' land. Four months after I bought the sawmill, I sold it for twice what I paid for it and bought a bigger one. I sawed the timber for my home, a big, 12 seven-stall barn, two carriage houses, three corn cribs, a wheat house, hen houses, a big woodhouse, a tool house, a workshop, a big smokehouse, a potato house, eight tobacco barns, a big pack house, and five tenant houses. Besides that, I had sold enough wood and timber to pay for what hardware, paint, and millwork I had to buy in Stratford and pay my labor for buildin'. When I had done all this, I was ready to start farmin' right. My buildin's was all up, plenty of cleared land and machinery, and five good tenants moved in ready to start work.

“My tenants farmed on half-shares. I had two white families and three nigger families. I always raised enough to furnish them all they wanted. I never had no trouble with my tenants.

“They all knowed I was square, and I expected them to be. I wouldn't stand no cussin', and I was the boss of my land. What they didn't know how to do, I showed 'em. I had a big bell hangin' in the back yard to ring for them, and the whole neighborhood used to set its clocks by it. I always had from six to eighteen hands to feed. There was a long home-made table in the kitchen with benches for them to sit on. We had special pots for 'em and fed 'em plenty meat and bread, boiled vittles, and buttermilk. I paid the hands from $8 to

$10 a month. Most of them went home at night, but some stayed on the place with the other niggers.

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“I never did have a tenant to get mad with me, and I never did have one to leave me, 'cept when he'd made enough money to buy his own land and start to farmin' for hisself, or died.

“We was mighty happy, Mavis and me, down there on the farm. The first year she was a little uneasy at night when I was late comin' home from town. It took her a good while to get used to Lon. She always had plenty of houseniggers, but Lon was faithful like an old dog. I told her, after she told me how scared she was of him, that I never would leave her there without him, that I'd trust him further than I would one of my brothers.

“Mavis fixed up the house with curtains and rugs and made sheets and such. She crocheted bedcovers and tablespreads. Our folks give us a lot of china and silverware and things for the house when we got married, but she always had some kind of fancy sewin' to do. She didn't 'sociate with many of the neighbors. She was kind and good to everybody, but mighty particular about the places she visited. Most of my horses were fast and frisky, but ole Bob was so gentle that Mavis drove him around herself.

“It was the last of October of the first year that we married that little Dave was born. I always was proud of my children, but that first one sorta got next to me. Dave was just seventeen months old when Martin was born.

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“One day I came to the house with a handful of potatoes. Dave came runnin, out to me and wanted to play with the potatoes. I put 'em up on the shelf and went to the other end of the porch to wash the dirt off my hands. He was pushin' his little gocart around, and I was trying to scrub the potato gum off my hands and won't watching him. When I looked up he was standin' up in that gocart, reachin' up towards the potatoes. Before I could get to him, the cart throwed him forward on the side of the wall. It knocked him unconscious. I

hollered for Lon to go for the doctor, and I had to tote his little limp body to his Ma. When he came to, he screamed and hollered. For eight days and nights we took turns sittin' by him and holdin' his little hot hands, then... God took him.

“We had forgot about everything else,” he continued, “but then we realized that we had little Martin. From now on, we had a new baby about every other year—all girls. There were four of them, Sally, Josie, Kate, and the last one, Becky, was the prettiest one of all.

“We had picnic dinners at all-day meetin's, and my wife used to take a wholesale, loose cracker box full of fried chicken, ham, pickles, cakes, pies, rolls, potato salad, chicken salad, and everything else good to eat. She was the best cook I ever saw anyhow. She always had plenty to cook, too, and never stinted on butter and eggs for nothin'. There 15 was always twenty to forty hams hangin' in the smokehouse; from ten to twenty barrels of molasses in the barn; potatoes and fresh fruit in the cellar of the potato house; plenty of eggs and chickens and fowl in the yard; and garden vegetables the year 'round. What won't growin' was dried or canned in season. We had plenty of home-made lard and flour by the dozen barrels.

“I loved to hunt and kept a yard full of fine hounds, setters, and pointers. I went huntin' the year 'round and was always bringin' game home. I always bought a whole cheese, two bunches of bananas, fifty pounds of coffee, five gallons of oysters, a wholesale box of loose crackers, and two or three pounds of hard candy for the children. I sent the wagon to get it—ten or twelve barrels. When we wanted fresh meat, I killed a lamb, a kid, or a beef. What we didn't eat or send to the neighbors, we swung down in the ice house. I was the only man in that section of the country that had a ice house.

“I built two fishponds about halt a mile below the house and stocked 'em with catfish, carp, and perch, 'specially for my wife. She was raised on a river and always loved to fish better then anybody I ever saw. She used to let the children go barefooted the first day of May,

and the first thing they would want to do was to go down and wade in the mossy branch while she was fishin'.

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“We always had a heap of company, ten or twelve extra for dinner every Sunday. We had two extra bedrooms, and they was always full.

“When Martin got up a little size and the children all come, the house just won't big enough. We fixed up the room over the ole dinin' room for Martin and used the dinin' room for a nursery for the girls. It opened right back of our bedroom. We had two beds in the nursery, and a trundle-bed.

“See that bureau?” he asked, pointing to a solid walnut chest of drawers which had a beautiful mirror and a section of three short drawers. That was in the nursery for the girls' clothes. I had to saw off the ten-inch legs, it was too high for the children to reach. Mavis said I just ruint the thing. Well, I bought it at a sale like I did everything else. I paid $4.25 for it, and there ain't a scar on it. I've bought many a fine piece like that for nothin' and sold it for a big profit. I bought this mahogany spool bed for $2. That wool home-made spread was wove on Maw's loom by slaves durin' the War.

“When we made a nursery out of the ole dinin' room I built on two more rooms, a dinin' room behind the parlor, with built-in cabinets. It had a door to open on the back porch, and a door that opened into the back hall. There was a room over that for the schoolroom. Mavis' sisters taught the children their lessons and music, too. I paid 'em $10 a month 17 board and room and anything else they wanted. We had a piano in the parlor, desks in the schoolroom. There was a two-room school across the road, but we never did send the children across the road. We didn't want then 'sociating with the no 'count trash that went there.

“I always carried Mavis to Stratford twice a year to shop, and we'd drive a pair of fine black matched horses. I gave her a blank check for I never believed in going in debt for nothin'.

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She boutht cloth by the bolt and thread by the box for all the family clothes and household needs. The bill always came to $150 or $200 and the storekeepers were always mighty glad to see her. When she came home, Mrs. Tolar, a widow who made her livin' sewing out, came to our house and stayed three or four weeks helpin' Mavis sew."

Josh stood up and after much scrambling through a stack of old photographs, he found the one he was hunting for.

There were four girls in the picture. In a row they resembled steps of stairs. They all wore gingham dresses, and their serious faces shone with health.

"This is the way Mavis looked when I married her," he said, smiling with pride as he handed me a small card from an envelope.

In the corner there was a small picture of a lovely girl with dark, innocent eyes and soft, wavy hair. I glanced at the picture of Mavis above the mantel. The hair was gray, and the eyes bore an expression of pain and trouble, but she was still beautiful.

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"I moved to Stratford the fall of 1907," Josh went on. "I'd bought this lot, and money was scarce. I built this house to sell. I never would have built it like this to live in. I sawed the timber, but the crook of a contractor buildin' it didn't build it near as good as I 'spected. He used some of my timber. Why, there ain't but one floorin' in a room in the house, and it ain't half underpinned. As I say, I meant to sell it.

"I'd been plannin' a year or two on breakin' up and movin' to town as soon as I got enough to build the sort of home I wanted. I never would have moved if it hadn't been to get the children in a good school, but I'm sorry many a time that I come to Stratford. I'm sorry I live here now, and if I could get away I'd leave.

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“I used to like Stratford before they all died out. But this young crowd of upstarts tryin' to run the county in the ground! Everything is so high. It looks like since I ain't raised my own meat and bread it takes so much to live. I keep tellin' Becky to cut out that phone and them 'lectric lights. Lamps was good enough for my pa and ma, and they're good enough for us. Since the well dried up we have to use the town water, but that costs all out of reason—$2.50 a month.

“I ought to stayed out in the country. I still had right much land out there at Ashtown when I sold my house and 19 moved to town. I still had my sawmills and I put 'em on that Ashtown land. Martin was a grown boy then and I took him in with me in the lumber business.

“I built a four-room house on the place, and had a store on it and me and Martin slept upstairs. We stayed down there durin' the week and come home at the end of the week. I was doin' more lumber business than anybody else in the county. I had a big sawmill. I could cut timber forty feet long and I furnished timber for all the big buildin's in Stratford. When I cut all the timber off that place down there I sold the sawmill.

“I used to thrash wheat every summer. I started off out there in the country with a ole horsepower machine, then a separator and boiler engine. The last one I had was the ole separator hooked up to the motor of a ole second-hand car. I made right/ smart money thrashin' wheat, besides all my flour and expenses. When we went around we'd always eat wherever we happened to be. I never would eat at a nigger house but once. His wife asked me not to leave before dinner. She fixed up for me with a white tablecloth and napkins. They both stood by the table and waited on me. 'Twas enough for twelve men.

“Naw child, wheat thrashin' was just one way they got to me. I saw folks all over the county in the lumber business, cotton ginnin', wheat thrashin', and tradin'. I 20 was a justice of the peace six or seven years, and county commissioner for four terms.

“Right after that, the county hired me as superintendent of the county road buildin'. I made many a friend by buildin' roads where there had never been no roads and fixin' bad roads the day they sent me word they needed fixin'. They paid me $150 a month, furnished me a car and paid all the travel expenses. It was the only job I ever had where I worked for a salary and had a boss. The county done way with that job in 1925, and I ain't had much since.

“I made and saved a heap of money, had good insurance and good property, but it's all gone now. After my girls got through school I had to keep on helpin' 'em along. They all taught school but Becky and she taught art. “Martin, po' boy, gave me more trouble than all the rest of them put together. Pretty soon after he married, he lost his job. Everyone he got he lost. Then I lent him money/ to go in business with a partner. The man with him, they said, gambled and Martin sold out to him. It was just that way all along. I took care of him and his wife, but that hussy was so demandin' and ungrateful. Wanted better than my own wife and children. Her daddy won't nothing but a Republican and a blacksmith at that.

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“When they got all I had one way or another, she went to live with her folks and wouldn't 'low him there. Martin went away, and the next thing I knowed he was in the penitentiary for bigamy. At the trial, he didn't know his wife's daddy, his wife, and three sons. I can't believe he was in his right mind. Anyhow that woman got a divorce and ain't bothered me since. I don't know whether Martin is dead or alive.

“That just about killed his ma. Then when her daughter, Kate, died, and this thing happened, she was so hurt she just couldn't hold her head up. I don't know what we would have done, but for what little she got when her ma's estate was sold.

“I sold off all I had to live on but this house, but now I ain't even got that. Now, I ain't got nothin'. I've give everything to my children, and the house and lot, too. If I didn't give it to them before I died it would have to be sold.

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“I don't cost 'em nothin'. I get the old-age pension. It [ain't?] but $30 a month, but it's enough for me and I buy a heap of food and wood and get the gardenin' done. As long as I have something to eat, I'll get along.”

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